

*The Museum
of the
Upper Lakes
Wasaga Beach,
Ontario*

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*Ministry of Natural
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American and British cannon roar in battle. The wood of a blockhouse splinters and flames crackle. It's the War of 1812—but the time is now.

The scene is set in the Electronic Theatre, the prelude to The Museum of the Upper Lakes at the resort village of Wasaga Beach. The Theatre recounts the final naval actions of the war between Canada and the United States on the Great Lakes. Sound, light and image combine to tell the story of the supply schooner Nancy and of her revenge.

After the experience of the Theatre, visitors following the winding paths of Nancy Island—created when the sunken schooner formed a blockage of the Nottasaga River, collecting sand and silt over 113 years. Under an awning of signal flags, the Nancy's hull is preserved as



a memento of a war receded into history after more than 15 decades of friendship.

Sails straining against the winds of the Lakes inspired the architecture of the Electronic Theatre and the adjacent museum.

The Museum displays:

A 12-foot rigged model of the schooner Nancy, built by the noted marine model-maker, William Van der Valk;

A full-scale replica of the Nancy's figure-head, carved originally by Skelling of New York and recreated by sculptor William Clements of Toronto;

A display of color transparencies of the Canada Steamship Lines Marine Historic Collection;

A series of half models illustrating three centuries of sail on the Great Lakes from LaSalle's Griffon to the present yacht;



Photographs and models depicting ships of the early days of Great Lakes commercial sail and steam;

Displays of pilotage, charting and navigational instruments, including a replica of 17th century mariner's astrolabe;

Complete wheelhouse equipment of S. S. John Ericsson, one of the last of the whaleback steamers on the Lakes, mounted on the upstream end of the building;

Boarding pikes, cutlasses and models of 1812 ships' armament.

The grounds of Nancy Island are transformed into a marine park with carronades, anchors, windlasses, navigation buoys and other relics of the Great Lakes lining the paths.

The story of navigation on the Lakes is further illustrated when visitors cross a suspension bridge to tiny Tower Island

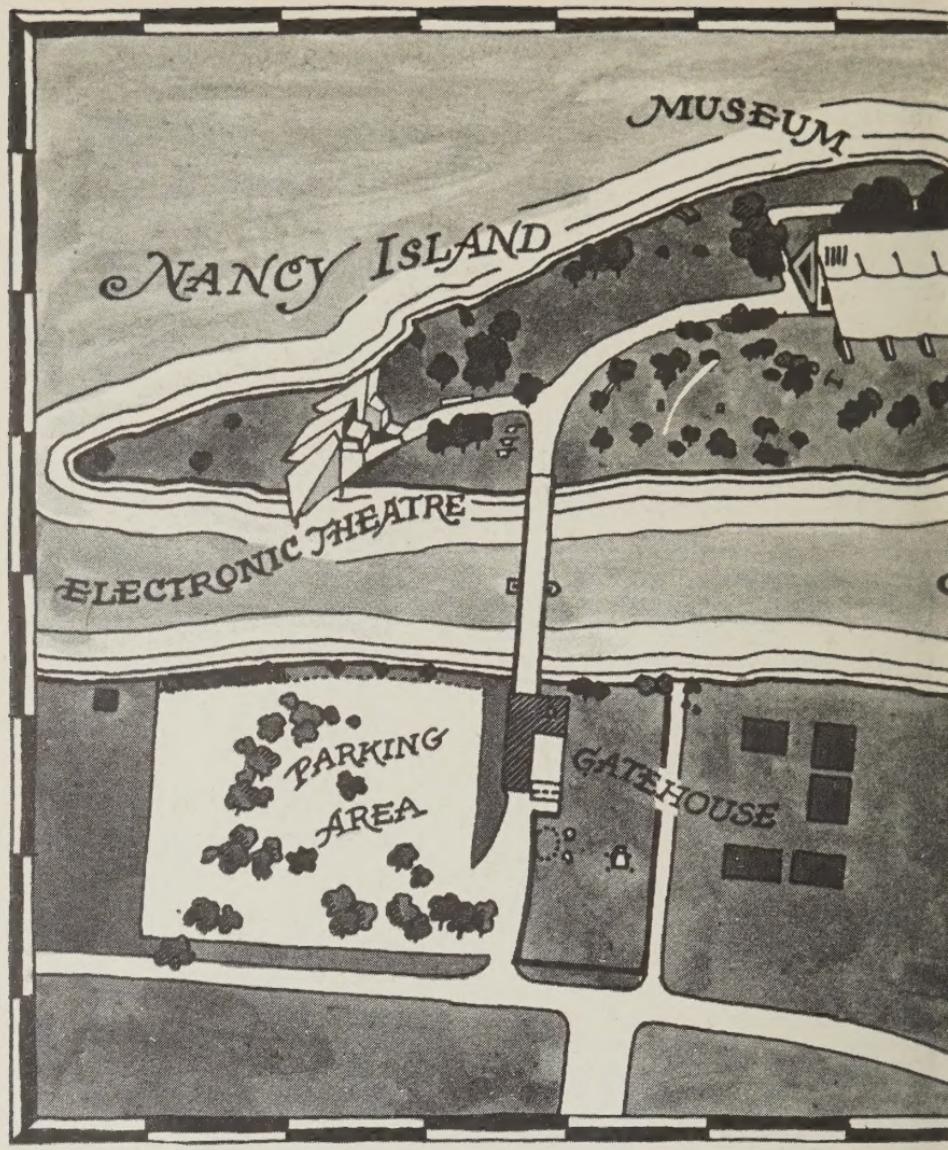


where stands a replica of an early Upper Lakes lighthouse. From here the visitor can plot the positions of the Nancy and the attacking American squadron.

The Story of the Nancy

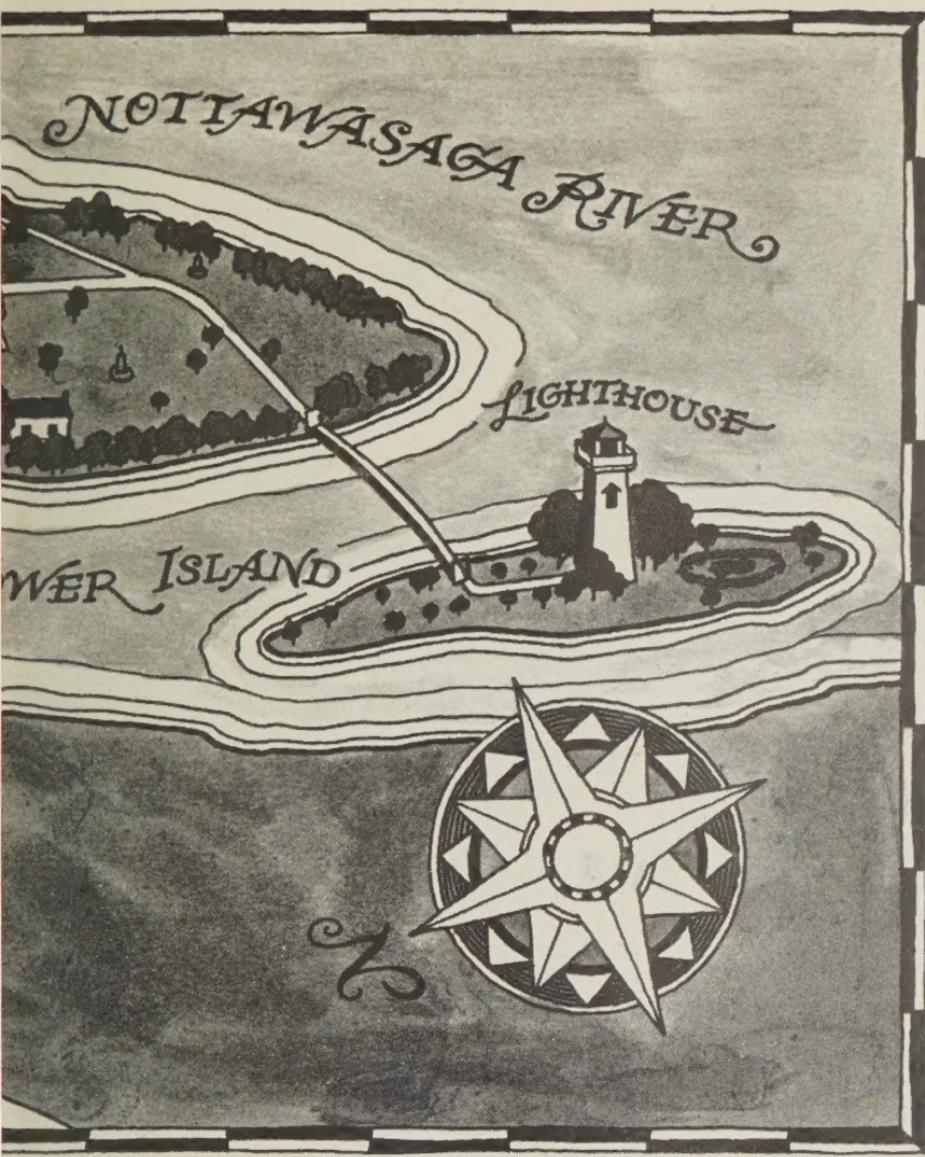
The Nancy was one of the first commercial cargo ships to sail the Upper Lakes. Built in 1789 at Detroit—then a British possession—the schooner was “a perfect masterpiece of workmanship and beauty”, according to her owners. From 1789 to 1812 she sailed the Great Lakes in the service of the fur trade, transporting pelts, supplies and trade goods.

In 1812, the Nancy was seconded to the British armed forces as a supply ship. Lightly armed, she sailed the hostile waters of the Lakes carrying men and supplies to the garrisons which controlled the northwest.



In August, 1814, the Nancy was quietly taken up the Nottawasaga River to an uneasy hiding place. She was the object of search by the last flotilla of fighting American ships ever to sail the Upper Lakes in anger. Nancy's task was to supply the British fort at Michilimackinac—the Gibraltar of the North that commanded the narrows between Lakes Huron and Michigan. The American forces, failing in their attempts to storm the fort, were intent on sinking Nancy. By destroying the supplies she carried, it was hoped to starve the Michilimackinac garrison into surrender.

By August 14, the American flotilla, comprised of the brig Niagara and the schooners Scorpion and Tigress, had located the Nancy and were shelling her over the narrow spit which separates the



Nottawasaga from Georgian Bay.

The American force of three ships, 24 cannon and 500 men easily destroyed the Nancy and the blockhouse built to protect her in spite of a "gallant defence" by the Nancy's crew of 22 seamen, 23 Indian allies and nine voyageurs, armed with three cannon.

The burning of the Nancy, however, was far from the end of the event.

The British force, under Lieutenant Miller Worsley, escaped the burning blockhouse and slipped into the forest. In open bateaux and a canoe, they made their way 360 miles across Lake Huron to Michilimackinac—on the way quietly evading Scorpion and Tigress, who were patrolling the area. Arriving at the fort, they unloaded supplies for the garrison and with reinforcements set out immediately



to find the American ships. Both were boarded and captured; the loss of the Nancy was avenged and that era of American seapower on the Upper Lakes was broken.



The Nancy had settled slowly into the Nottawasaga, hissing and crackling, a pall of smoke hanging over the river. Her place was marked only by a swirl in the river current. Indians came periodically and salvaged her cargo. As the countryside was cleared by lumber operations, raftsmen anchored their booms on the sunken schooner.

Year by year the river piled silt around the hull until Nancy Island was formed.

“By 1912”, wrote the Great Lakes historian C. H. J. Snider, “the Nancy was barely visible among the lily pads at the southeastern end of the island, opposite



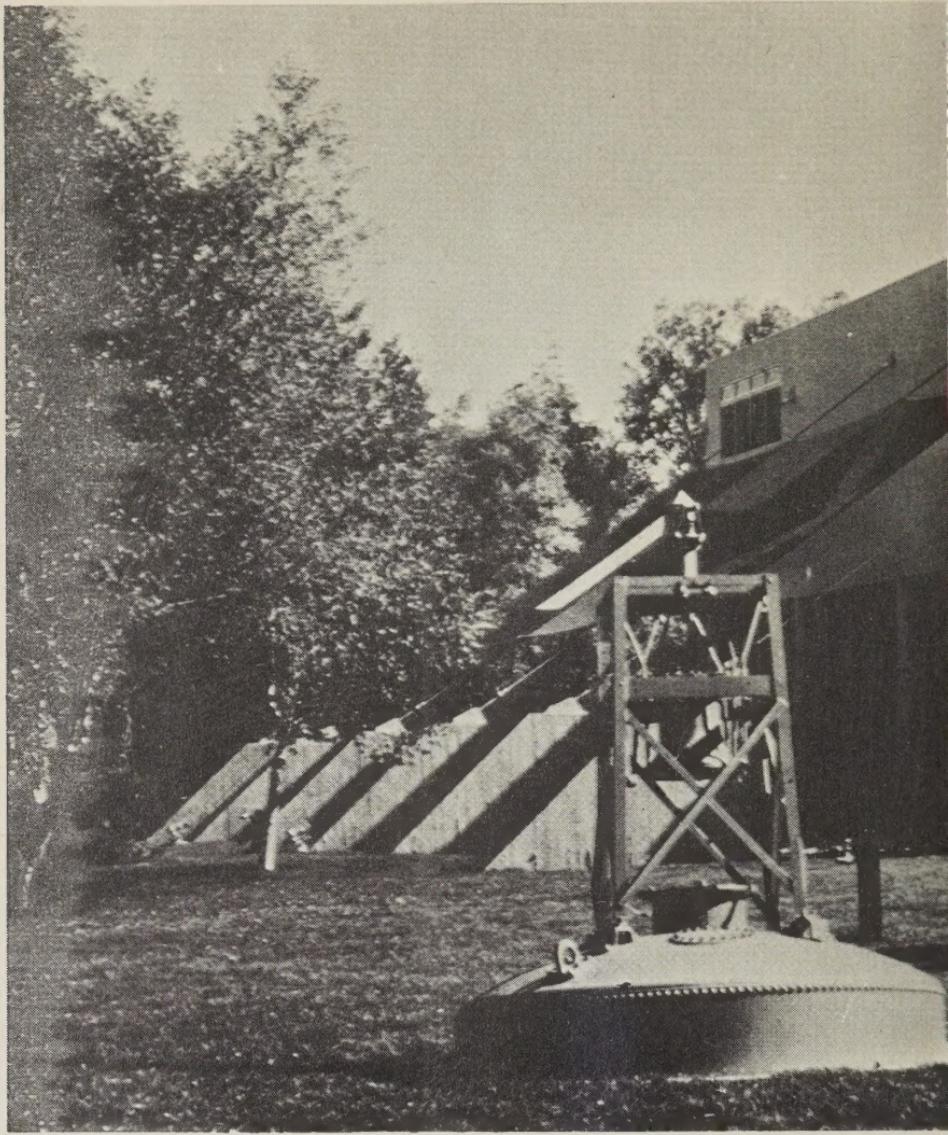
the bare-faced sandbank on which the defending blockhouse once stood."

The hull was recovered in 1927, more than a century after she sank. A memorial to the schooner was established on the island. That first memorial has grown into The Museum of the Upper Lakes.



Nancy's captors, Scorpion and Tigress, lived to sail the lakes for another two decades.

Three months after their capture by Worsley, the War of 1812 was ended by the Treaty of Ghent. Tigress, renamed Confiance, and Scorpion, renamed Surprise, were kept in the Royal Navy and based for a time at the Naval and Military Establishments (1814-1856) at Penetanguishene. They lived out their days in patrol and communications duties



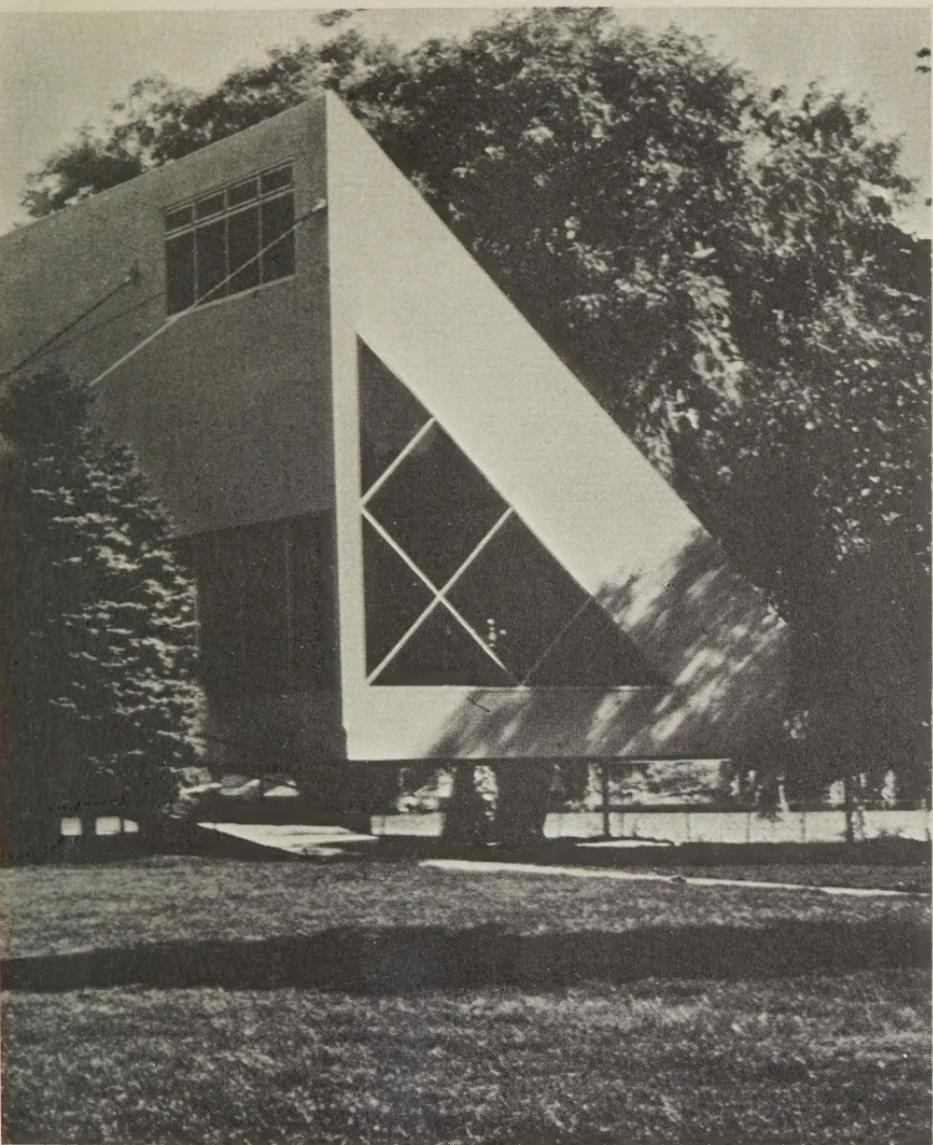
and were used in the charting of the Upper Lakes. They were finally laid up "in ordinary"; rotted and decayed, they had sunk by 1835.



The Museum of the Upper Lakes is a Heritage Project of Huronia Historical Parks which also includes:

Sainte-Marie among the Hurons (1639-1649) at Midland: a reconstruction of Ontario's first European community where lived six of North America's eight French Jesuit martyr saints. The famed mission centre, never attacked, was burned by the Jesuits to prevent desecration by the invading Iroquois, who virtually obliterated the Huron nation.

The British Naval and Military



Establishments (1814-1856) at
Penetanguishene: currently at an advanced
state of restoration and reconstruction
by the University of Western Ontario.

For assistance in charting tours of
Heritage Projects, historic sites and scenic
treasures in the southern Georgian Bay
Region, you are invited to write:

History Voyages.
Sainte-Marie, Midland, Ontario, Canada.
Telephone (705) 526-7838.

**The Hon. Leo Bernier
Minister of Natural Resources
Walter Q. Macnee, Deputy Minister**



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